

refers to the state of existence of someone who is undergoing the process of dying. It is a coarse death state because it is visible to others. The subtle death state refers to the state of existence at the time of the subtle mind of death (*'chi sems phra mo*). This subtle mind of death manifests only for a smallest moment in time, accounting for the second type of death state being subtle. Immediately after the arising of the subtle mind of death the mental consciousness separates from the physical body.

Non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond (i.e. attain self-liberation) in the intermediate state are of three types:

- a) Those who go beyond quickly
- b) Those who do not go beyond quickly
- c) Those who go beyond after a long time

a) Those who go beyond quickly

Those who go beyond quickly (*myur bar 'da' ba*) are non-returners who attain Nirvana shortly after they reach the intermediate state. According to Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Stairway to Clear Awareness***, the first moment of that intermediate state marks the first moment of the ninth uninterrupted path of the path of meditation, the *Vajra-like Stabilization*.

b) Those who do not go beyond quickly

Those who do not go beyond quickly (*myur ba ma yin par 'da' ba*) are non-returners who attain Nirvana just before the time when intermediate state beings [usually] generate the notion to search for a rebirth.

c) Those who go beyond after a long time

Those who go beyond after a long time (*ring mo zhig nas 'da' ba*) are non-returners who attain Nirvana at the time when intermediate state beings [usually] have generated the intention to proceed to a rebirth

Please note that *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm and go beyond in the intermediate state* may attain Nirvana in any of the four levels of the Form Realm. Moreover, since the four levels of the Form Realm are subdivided into seventeen sub-levels, these non-returners may become foe-destroyers in any of the intermediate states of these sub-levels, with the exception of the third sub-level of the First Concentration, called *Great Brahma* (as will be explained below).

In order to get a better understanding of the different types of *non-returners who will proceed to the Form Realm* it is vital to comprehend the seventeen sub-levels, which are called the 'Seventeen Types of Abodes of the Form Realm' (*gzugs khams gnas rigs bcu bdun*).

THE SEVENTEEN TYPES OF ABODES OF THE FORM REALM:

The First, Second, and Third Concentration Levels are each subdivided into three levels while the Fourth Concentration Level is subdivided into eight levels.

The three abodes of the **First Concentration Level** are:

- 1) Brahma Type (Skt.: *brahmakayika*, Tib.: *tshangs ris*)
- 2) Reciting in Front of Brahma (Skt.: *brahmapurohita*, Tib.: *tshang pa mdun na 'don*)
- 3) Great Brahma (Skt.: *mahabrahmana*, Tib.: *tshangs chen*)

The three abodes of the **Second Concentration Level** are:

- 4) Little Light (Skt.: *parittabha*, Tib.: *'od chung*)
- 5) Limitless Light (Skt.: *apramanabha*, Tib.: *tshad med 'od*)
- 6) Bright Light (Skt.: *abhasvara*, Tib.: *'od gsal*)

The three abodes of the **Third Concentration Level** are:

- 7) Little Virtue (Skt.: *parittasuba*, Tib.: *dge chung*) [or] Little Bliss (Skt.: *parittasuba*, Tib.: *bde chung*)
- 8) Limitless Virtue (Skt.: *apramanasuba*, Tib.: *tshad med dge*) [or] Limitless Bliss (Skt.: *apramanasuba*, Tib.: *tshad med dge*)

9) Vast Virtue (Skt.: *subakrtsna*, Tib.: *dge rgyas*) [or] Vast Bliss (Skt.: *subakrtsna*, Tib.: *bde rgyas*)

The eight abodes of the **Fourth Concentration Level** are:

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| 10) Cloudless (Skt.: <i>anabharakah</i> , Tib.: <i>sprin med</i>) | |
| 11) Born from Merit (Skt.: <i>punyaprasavah</i> , Tib.: <i>bsod nams skye</i>) | |
| 12) Great Result (Skt.: <i>brhatphala</i> , Tib.: <i>'bras bu che</i>) | |
| 13) Not Great (Skt.: <i>avrha</i> , Tib.: <i>mi che ba</i>) | |
| 14) Without Pain (Skt.: <i>atapasa</i> , Tib.: <i>mi gdung ba</i>) | |
| 15) Excellent Appearance (Skt.: <i>sudrsa</i> , Tib.: <i>gya nom snang ba</i>) | } The Five Pure Abodes |
| 16) Great Perception (Skt.: <i>sudarsana</i> , Tib.: <i>shin tu mthong ba</i>) | |
| 17) Not Low (Skt.: <i>akanishta</i> , Tib.: <i>'og min</i>) | |

As explained before, the four Concentration Levels correspond to the four concentrations, with the first concentration causing rebirth in the First Concentration Level, the second concentration in the Second Concentration Level, and so forth. Since the main causes for taking rebirth in the Form Realm are meditative absorptions, the environment and beings of this realm are subtler and more rarefied than those of the Desire Realm.

The Form Realm is thus called because, unlike celestial beings in the Formless Realm, beings in this realm have a physical body and can see and communicate with one another. However, their bodies are composed of subtle substances and are invisible to beings of the Desire Realm; they are radiant and free from any unpleasant smell; they do not get old, sick, and so forth. Furthermore, they lack sexual distinction.

Celestial beings of the Form Realm are free from sexual desire as well as desire for food and odors. In fact, there are no tastes or odors in the Form Realm, and its inhabitants sustain themselves with the food of concentration. Even though they have desire for the sights, sounds, and tangible objects of the Form Realm (a desire which is much subtler than the desire of the Desire Realm) they do not experience any anger, resentment, etc.

There is no day and night in the Form Realm and its inhabitants do not sleep. They are said to live in an environment made of precious substances and in great mansions.

The higher the level of the Form Realm, the greater the physical height and lifespan of its inhabitants, which accounts for the lifespan of celestial beings of the higher levels of the Form Realm averaging many eons.

The sub-levels of the First, Second, and Third Concentration Levels as well as the first three sub-levels of the Fourth Concentration Level are ordinary levels (as opposed to Arya levels) because sentient beings who are reborn there are not necessarily Aryas. These ordinary sub-levels correspond in general to the quality of the four concentrations with regard to, for instance, intensity and continuity.

Therefore, a meditator who attained the first concentration but whose meditation lacks intensity and continuity is likely to be reborn in the *Brahma Type Abode*. A meditator whose meditation possesses intensity but no continuity, or continuity but no intensity is likely to be reborn in the *Reciting in Front of Brahma Abode*. And a meditator whose meditation possesses both intensity and continuity is likely to be reborn in the *Great Brahma Abode*. The same applies to the remaining ordinary sub-levels.

The three sub-levels of the First Concentration Level derive their names from the god Brahma who is the central figure of the First Concentration Level. The lowest of the three is called *Brahma Type*, for celestial beings in this realm belong to the assembly of Brahma. The next level is called *Reciting in Front of Brahma* because its inhabitants recite the Vedas in front of Brahma. And the third level is called *Great Brahma* since this is the abode of Brahma himself.

Brahma is the first celestial being who took rebirth in this level upon the First Concentration Level coming into existence.

Hence he believes himself to be the creator of this level, its inhabitants, and indeed of the entire world system. The other celestial beings who were subsequently born in the *Great Brahma Abode* hold the same view.

Therefore, the inhabitants of this sub-level are characterized by holding the afflicted wrong view that Brahma is the creator of everything, which is why the third sub-level of the First Concentration is the only abode of the Form Realm in which non-returners do not take rebirth.